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The Story of Yanka Weiss

(Janice Farkas)



Entrance to Auschwitz

“Arbeit Macht Frei”

Thus began the unfortunate events!

Passover, 1944

I got a letter from my girlfriend. She wrote that they were getting the Jews together from villages and taking them to the town in the ghetto. If we get to Berekszas, I can stay where she works, they have a big house there.

Our neighbor, Faige, was deported to the Ukraine two years before. My mother told her what my girlfriend wrote and she answered that our lives have ended. Maybe they'll have only four or five weeks to live.

That's how it was.

After Passover, the Hungarian Zsandarms (police) came and gave the order to pack our things in two days. At that time, my father had a big problem because a young cow couldn't give birth. People came over to help him but they couldn't do anything. They had to slaughter the cow. He was busy with that. My mother sent me to Kovezsd to kill some chickens to cook for the trip. But where were we going?

We packed dishes, bedclothes, clothes for everyone, grease, and matzah - everything we could. On the morning of the third day I didn't want to wake up. My mother said, "Wake up daughter, you won't be sleeping in this bed again!"

On this day, the Zsandarms (police) came and gave the order to put on the table jewelry, money, and watches. If they pat us down and find something, they will shoot us down like dogs. We had to get out of the house. A man from the village locked the door. My mother begged and cried to let her back in for another pair of shoes, but he said, "You can't. The door is already locked."

Not far from the village there was a big hill called Kalebereg where they gathered the Jews from three villages - Bogarevice, Volovice, and Komlos. Using a typewriter, they wrote everybody's name with their birth-date. Horse pulled carriages carried us to the village Ilosva, to the Jewish synagogue. We were very tightly packed together on the floor. We unpacked what we brought and ate. The whole day there was no time for anything but listening to orders.

A couple of days later in Ilosva, they put us in train wagons with barely any room to sit. Only once they gave us water to drink in Beregszas at night. We continued going and arrived in Munkach at the Sajovits brick factory. Every family arranged to stay on the ground any which way they could. There were five of us. My father and mother were 44 years old, grandma 80, my younger sister 11, and I, 17. They constantly counted us. Every barrack had an overseer. They had black clothes. Svab (German) young boys were constantly hitting us with rubber sticks whenever they felt like.

In the vicinity there was a lake where we took our clothes to wash and brought water to wash our faces in the morning. We lay on the floor side by side. They were constantly checking us to make sure we were there. At night, one person from the family had to stay in front of the kitchen with a paper that said how many there were in the family. The overseers were standing with their rubber sticks. If they didn't like somebody or didn't like the bowl for food, they began hitting us. The beatings they used for entertaining themselves. Once the pea soup was burnt and I didn't want to eat it. My mother was begging me to eat the soup but I said that I'd rather die than eat it. A neighboring girl who was getting soup from another kitchen overheard that and brought me soup that was not burnt so I could eat. I was in a lot of trouble with my mother.

We stayed in that ghetto for four weeks.

One morning, orders came to pack up and get out from the barracks. We were chased. We had to go fast into the train wagons, walking on ramps. They were hitting us like animals so we should go faster. My grandma got such a hit that she lost her mind. She yelled "It is enough traveling, let's go home!" I also was hit on my legs. It hurt very much. We were crowded in the train and there was just enough room to sit. It was a slow ride, a very slow ride. A lot of times the train was only standing. Eventually, the train stopped at Kassa. Workers from working camps brought us water. They didn't give us food anywhere. Only those who had food with them ate.

The train went slowly. Before we arrived, my mother looked out the small window with bars. She saw the "lager" (concentration camp), which was very large, and said to my father, "Ignatz, I see only young people." She fainted. We had smelling salts and she got better. One afternoon we arrived and they opened the door. They put down the ramps and said, "shnell-shnell (fast-fast)! Out!" Men in striped clothes and striped hats, Jewish prisoners, told us to say that we are 18 or 20 years old. The SS asked me how old I am. I said 18. We walked for awhile, it seemed to be through the forest. When we came out, we had to be five in a row. Then they told the men to go in front. My father went and looking back said, "Don't report that you are sick." My mother told him to watch not to get beaten. I never saw my father again.

Over there, German SS were in command. We were in such fear. Only four of us left, and so fast it happened that a German SS pulled me aside to the right and I never saw my family again. This was Aushwitz, the death camp.

There was music with loud speakers "Achtung! Achtung!, (Attention! Attention!)." They chased us into a large hall. We had to get undressed. They said in many languages to put the clothes on the floor so on the way back we could recognize them. I had a red polka dot dress. I put it on top of all the

clothes so I could recognize it from far away. We carried the shoes in our hands. They shaved us bald and we didn't recognize each other. In my shoes I had a little mirror that had a photo of me and my sister that was sent to me by my brother Arthur from the work camps as a gift. A German woman found it in my shoes and broke it into pieces. After that, they chased us into another building where they gave us a piece of soap and then came a shower. Afterwards, they chased us into another place. They gave us thin grey dresses - whatever anybody could get, short or long. The bottom of the dress was cut to make a belt. Later, the taller girls changed clothes with the shorter ones to fit into the right dresses. They chased us into barracks where there were three layers of living space (bunks). Ten to fourteen girls could sit on each layer.

At night we started crying. We were cold, only one piece of clothing, nothing else. We asked old prisoners from Czechoslovakia and Poland who spoke Yiddish when we would see our family. They answered that they are there in the fire. There were six crematoriums there. Of course, we didn't believe these people. We thought the crematoriums were ovens to bake bread. Unfortunately, they were saying the truth.



Visiting the Crematorium at Auschwitz

At night, our stomachs were hurting from the cold. I had to go to the bathroom, but there had to be 20 people in line. We all had to wait for the 20. We had to go to the toilet in bowls which were standing in a pile. In the

morning the bowls were rinsed out and we drank black coffee from it without sugar. From one bowl, five of us were drinking the coffee.

In the morning we had to stand in célapel (rows of five) between barracks outside. They were counting us for hours. At night they whistled for us to come out for counting: five in a row, fifty in a square. Sometimes we stayed for three or four hours. When they finished counting, they gave us a piece of bread, a little square of margarine or some stinky cheese and then they let us get back into the barracks. On the second night in Auschwitz, the German SS didn't see me. I was the fifth in line - small, skinny, and crouching because I was cold. He came with a stick and hit my head. This célapel (counting) went on every morning and evening for hours.

The third morning they gave us a card to write to relatives. The card had a return address – Valdzej (vacationing place). I knew my brother Arthur's address where he was at the working camp but I didn't want to write to him so they wouldn't bring him over. In a few days at the morning célapel (counting), Mengele, the notorious German doctor chose one thousand girls, naked, with shoes in their hands, checking every one of them and pointing to one side. They put us in a train. We didn't travel far but it took us almost two days to get to Plasov near Krakov in Poland. We were all Carpathian. In the morning they were counting us again. There was icy rain. We were frozen by the time we got to the barracks. The German prisoners who were there a long time threw clothes at us filled with fleas. The whole night we were scratching ourselves. A few days later they took us for disinfection. The Polish prisoners were cursing us because the Germans took two thousand old people and children to Auschwitz to be burned in our place.

In Plasov there was a very big Jewish cemetery. First it was a ghetto, then they built barracks and it became a concentration camp. Every morning and evening at counting people would come to choose as many girls as they needed for jobs in a Krakov factory and inside of the camp. I was never out of concentration camps. Most of the time I had to break stones all day in all types of weather. In the hot sun sitting on the ground with the hammer, breaking the stones into small pieces without glasses, or carrying lumber quite far into the hill. There was a big hole. People who died were being burnt there and often the dead people were brought in from the town. Sometimes they were killed while trying to escape which we recognized by their clothes because they had red and black lines painted on them. We had numbers on our clothes. We had no names. When we worked at the death hall where people were burnt, we lost our appetite too after seeing how they were throwing sawdust and lumber

and pouring gasoline on the dead bodies. There was a big fire and lots of smoke and a horrible stench coming from it.

Once three girls were carrying lumber. I was in the middle and the SS decided that two of them were enough. He chased a dog on me and it bit my ankle. I went to the revir (hospital). They wrapped paper thickly around my foot and in two days I had to go back to work.

Another time I was appointed to work on a hill to dig over an old cemetery. When we found gold teeth or rings, we had to put them in a box that was held by a German SS. That was a hard day. We couldn't even pick up our heads, just work. Nearby a girl was working and she said, "Let's go to the latrina (toilet)." The latrina was only a piece of rod above a ditch and in front of it was a wooden fence so people wouldn't see us – "privacy". We asked each other's name, where we came from. We were crying about how it was at home and she told me to make sure we don't get to work with the same SS again. Her name was Irene from Voloszk. Now she lives in Brooklyn.

The concentration camp was fenced in with a high wire fence. We had to pull the grass about two meters away from this fence by hand. On the other side of the fence, the German SS on horses were watching how the girls were working. If they noticed somebody was not working hard, they were throwing stones and laughing: "farfluchte Jude". That was their entertainment.



Electrified Fence

When I was sick with fever, I couldn't go out to work. The girls led me to work because only in the evening you could report to the revir (hospital). There I lay down the whole day. At midday, the overseer threw me a piece of bread crust but I didn't pick it up. The girls ran over and picked it up, they were hungry. At night I went to the hospital. I was there for two days. When I got better, back to work.

At night, a lot of people went in front of the kitchen to stay in line to wash heavy food containers. There was a lot of pushing in line because for this job they gave a piece of bread and some sweet rice. I managed to get in once; but they didn't write my number. When we were ready with washing dishes at two o'clock in the morning, I got some rice and I begged for a little sugar with margarine for my "sick sister" but I didn't get the bread because I was not on the list. I didn't go again. I couldn't stand it anymore. It was very hard to wash the big dishes. I was at Plasov for three months. The Polish who were there for a long time said there is no hope to get free.

One morning, there was a big shooting. They chased us out from the barracks with whistles, "Shnell-Shnell stand in lines quickly." There was some kind of uprising where the Jews and Germans were exchanging gunfire. They put us very fast in train-wagons, 150 girls in each, and a few hours later, wounded Polish-Jewish men were put into our wagon, seventeen in all. There was no air to breathe. The girls were fainting. No place to sit. By night we arrived to Auschwitz-Birkenov. They put us on big white trucks as we got off from the train. The men went straight to the crematorium. The girls were separated by Mengele.

Out of 1,000 girls, only 700 were left alive. Again we were shaved, showered, and put in the barracks without clothes. We were given only water in big containers. Everybody was drinking and getting very sick with aches and pains from the water. In another barrack, they gave us clothes – I got a man's shirt that was ripped into strips in the back, without buttons and a skirt that had no zipper. I had to hold it with one hand all day so it wouldn't fall off. The only time my hand got to rest was when I laid down. Again, morning and evening we had to be counted and we had no work to do but stayed put in the barracks trying to find something to do. In the morning there was one bowl of black coffee to be shared by five girls. In the afternoon we got some type of soup with few potatoes and if somebody was lucky they got some horsemeat. In the evening, after counting and standing in rows, we got a piece of sawdust bread and a small cube of margarine or a stinky cheese. One afternoon we had to line up by ABC order and I got a tattoo on my arm – the number "A-22224".

After a couple of weeks again Mengele did a selection. We stood naked, in rows. I was chosen among 200 girls. That night we still slept in the same old place. My head hurt a lot. I was sleeping on the end of a bunk and I was talking feverishly in Ukrainian. A girl who slept near me hit me and asked what I was saying. I told her that I saw a Christian neighborhood girl named Marika walking by. This girl told me that I got crazy.

Early in the morning the 200 chosen girls were sent to F.K.L. lager (concentration camp) where we took a shower and chose clothes and shoes from a big pile. That's all - no underwear. They put us, 100 girls, in each wagon, gave us bread and margarine for the road and in two containers water. At the door, two vermacht soldiers were standing. They were much better than the SS soldiers.

We arrived in a small town called Gebharszdorf. There were SS women overseers waiting for us at the wagons and they were asking where our packages were (Kajne vese). They didn't know where we came from. We arrived at the yard of a factory where there were piles of beets and cabbage. We thought we were not going to be starving. They took us in rows into the dining room where six girls were seated at one table. They gave us thick soup and baked potato in the skin. From happiness we were crying that we ate with spoons and plates as humans. The Kommando Furerin came over and asked us "What's the problem? Don't you like the food?" She was asking us where we came from. They never heard of that place and told us if we're going to be good and work good, we'll have a good life there. After eating, we walked to a big building where 30 girls in one room slept on straw or bags of wood shavings, a small, thin pillow and two blankets - one for the ground and one to cover. That day we rested. The next morning we went to the airplane factory where the big girls were given big machines to work on. I was very small and skinny. I was left behind and given a small machine with the other 14 girls. We were drilling small holes, 1,000 pieces a day or at night. We were not starving. It was very strict for cleanliness. For example, if we worked at night or early morning we had to take a shower before going to sleep. The job was from six to six. When the sun came up, the Kommando Furerin SS woman came in. We had to stand up naked in rows. She was watching to see if we had any shiny aluminum pieces on our body. Two girls were dark skinned and the SS overseer was washing them with a wire brush. One of them couldn't take it and died. The other ended up dying from a lung disease. Both were buried.

One week as we were in Gebharszdorf at night, we washed our clothes and naked we went out to hang them on the fence to dry. Across the road was a building where men were working. They reported us to German SS

Kommando Furering that every night they see naked girls. The German SS screamed at us that we can not do things like that. Where did we come from? The woods? We told her that we came from Auschwitz. They didn't know what that was. At once they brought us extra clothes. This went on for two months.

Two hundred additional girls were brought to the factory. The amount of food decreased for everyone. The dining area was divided into two areas. One was for prisoners and the other for German workers. Whatever the German workers did not finish the hungry Jewish girls ate. Saturday and Sunday morning, after coffee, they took us out to the fields to pick potatoes and beets. We were there from September until the end of January. From there we walked for two weeks because the Russian front was getting closer. At night they locked us in a barn. They gave us warm soup and a piece of bread with margarine or cheese. In the morning, after the black coffee, we stood in rows until they counted us and started walking on one side of the road. On the other side were the Russian prisoners-of-war. They were talking loudly to each other in Russian so we could hear that the war is finishing soon and the Russians are close. It was hard to walk with shoes with wooden soles in snow. The Russian soldiers were asking who are we? We were answering, making believe we are talking to each other so the Germans wouldn't think we were exchanging information with the men. We stopped for a rest in Kratzov where Mengele was to choose the sick ones. My legs were swollen. I got an infection and my other foot was also hurting. I couldn't walk anymore. When a carriage with horses and 20 girls on top came by, I decided to get on the carriage. I knew it was the end. But we arrived to a place, which looked like a restaurant where they gave us food to eat and water to drink until the rest of the girls who walked caught up. When they saw us still alive, they couldn't believe it.

In a few days we arrived in St. Georgental. In that lager (camp) there was an old building that was fixed up and three layered bunks were built in it. A German, Jewish female doctor was checking out the sick people. I was barely waiting in line when I got to her. With scissors, she cut the wrapped up papers from my leg. Maggots filled my legs. She poured some kind of liquid and said "slime fisze" (sick legs). She gave an injection in my butt. For a few weeks I didn't have to go to work. When at last I went back to work, I had to walk for half an hour back to the factory, which was hard with wooden soled slippers. I was putting together lamps. The Germans didn't know what work to give us. They were packing up the expensive machines and sending them farther from the front.

Once we saw a Jewish man on a bicycle with a white band on his arm and a Jewish yellow star on top. The girls started to try to figure out what it was. The

German woman said , “The megynen kvachen haben tzu zein a farlestliche yude.” (The girls talking saw a trustworthy Jew) One day, they took us to a delousing place. In the barracks we had heaters where we were warming up water in a bowl to wash hands and face. We were getting very little food, we were walking to work and the civilians brought us potatoes and some bread but the overseers didn’t care what was going on.

Came May 1, 1945. A civilian woman who was giving me work told me that the black flag hanging means “Hitler kaput.” She gave me her address. Her name was Frau Kni and she asked me if I know Russian. I said “javol”(yes) and she told me that the Russians are coming and when I get freed, to come visit her. On the evening of May 7, 1945, the female doctor came in and told us to be quiet, freedom is coming. We became happy and started hugging each other. In the morning they didn’t whistle the wake up sign to go line up. A few girls went out but the doctor chased them back inside.

The Russian tanks came to the town of Georgental and the soldiers came to the lager (camp). Some of them were Jewish. They didn’t let us out from the barracks. They looked around to pick up mines in between barracks. Afterwards, they opened up the pantry where they had potatoes and canned goods. The girls cooked in the kitchen and we all ate and got bad stomach aches from eating too much at once.

The German woman who ran away left beautiful SS suits. The skinny bald girls started to dress up. When the Russian soldiers saw it, they said they are going to get shot if they don’t throw those clothes away. For two days there was thievery. No one was arrested. The civilians ran away because they were afraid of the Russians. The first day I was very sick from eating but the next day I went to Frau Kni and I told her “ich habe durechfal” (I have diarrhea). She cooked tea and toast and tasted the tea herself so I wouldn’t be afraid of poisoning. She told me that her husband was an English prisoner of war and she has an 11-year-old daughter. I thanked her “danke shon” and said goodbye.

St. Georgental was a small town. I felt better and I went with the rest of the girls to look around. One woman looked down from the second floor and I asked her if I could go up and have some milk. She told me that she doesn’t have any now but she threw down stockings and a nice striped blouse. I thanked her for it. I went further and saw a small castle. Some girls were taking whatever they wanted. I went also but we were scared of Russian soldiers which were sleeping, drunk on the steps. I went up another floor and there was a nice wall unit. I picked some knives, forks, and spoons, and a beautiful damask tablecloth in which I put 27 porcelain figurines to take home for memories. Third day, men with white stripe ribbons on their sleeves took us to

a school, gave us food, and wrote down who wants to go where to their home. I went in one transport to Czechoslovakia. Then in Prague one night we walked to the cattle train. They put us in the train and took us to Budapest in Hungary. Until then the train didn't stop even once. In Budapest we were given a place to stay and papers and food. In the morning we were placed in a school called Erzsebet. They gave us food and money and then I went home to the neighbors in my home village. From my family, only my oldest brother, Arthur survived. Everybody else perished.



Janice Farkas
brother

and her
Arthur Weiss